

MINUTES
SENATE RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: Wednesday, January 22, 2014

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Pearce, Vice Chairman Bair, Senators Cameron, Siddoway, Brackett, Heider, Tippetts, Stennett and Lacey

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CALL TO ORDER: **Chairman Pearce** called the Senate Resources and Environment Committee (Committee) meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. He then asked Senator Heider to present his RS.

RS 22526: **Senator Heider** said that as part of the Pacific Fisheries Legislative Task Force, Idaho plays a role in the production and life cycle of Pacific salmon. The seafood and fish producing states were asked to send a memorial to Congress to ask them to acquire sufficient funding for effectual and maintained domestic marketing of American seafood. He noted that Idaho is the last state to do so and asked for support of this Senate Joint Memorial.

MOTION: **Senator Siddoway** made the motion to send **RS 22526** to print. The motion was seconded by **Vice Chairman Bair**. During the discussion, a question was raised about the source of funding and also if the industry contributes to the funding. **Senator Heider** said that he would research the questions and be prepared to answer them when the Memorial is presented on the Senate Floor. The motion passed unanimously by **voice vote**.

Chairman Pearce welcomed Mr. Jeff Gould, Wildlife Bureau Chief, Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), who gave a presentation on the "Idaho Wolf Management Update".

SPEAKER: **Mr. Gould** said the Idaho Wolf Management Plan is guided by the 2002 Idaho Wolf Conservation Plan which was developed by the Idaho Legislative Wolf Oversight Committee and approved by the Idaho Legislature, as well as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2002. This plan is the foundation of the delisting rule in 2009 that transferred wolf management from the federal government to the state of Idaho. **Mr. Gould** said that he would cover how the State is implementing the conservation plan in terms of wolf monitoring, depredation control, hunting and trapping, agency control efforts, and the costs associated with these management activities.

In general, IDFG collects and evaluates harvest information and population information on species that are hunted and trapped. In the case of the wolf, the purpose of the post delisting monitoring is to verify that the recovered species remains secure from the risk of extinction after they no longer have protection.

Mr. Gould stated that he has provided a wolf management update in the form of a graph (see attachment 1). Figure 1 shows the estimated year-end wolf population in Idaho from 1995-2012. Figure 2 is the number of confirmed packs and breeding pairs (a pack is at least 2 adults and 2 surviving pups) at year-end, 1995-2012. On the reverse side of the attachment, the information is about confirmed wolf depredations and mortalities in Idaho from 2003 to December 31, 2013.

With regard to wolf monitoring, in 2002, it was reported there was a minimum of 683 wolves from 117 packs. That represented an 11 percent decline of the wolf population during that year. Thirty-five packs qualified as breeding pairs, and due to smaller litter size, lack of successful reproduction, and removal of breeding pack members are other factors for the decline. The final count for 2013 will be provided in April, after an in-depth process. Monitoring wolves has become very challenging and expensive. Radio collars are lost through hunting and trapping, as well as wildlife control actions. Currently, there are 70 animals with radio collars. Due to the cost and human risk, **Mr. Gould** said that they need to get away from this type of monitoring and will probably monitor wolves like they do bears and lions (cameras and observation).

Mr. Gould said that they are keenly aware of the issue of the wolf impact on livestock. Control authorizations continue to be administered by the regional staff, working directly with Wildlife Services. Wildlife Services removed 74 wolves in response to 78 depredations that were fielded from livestock operators. Confirmed losses amounted to 40 cattle, 404 sheep, and 5 dogs that were killed by wolves in 2013. In addition to working with Wildlife Services, the Idaho County Sheriff's Department, their staff, and some landowners were authorized to address a wolf control measure in Clearwater County where another three wolves were removed during that incident.

The heart of management actions is the hunting and trapping programs, with the first hunting season in 2009/2010. Hunting was allowed in 11 management zones across the State, with each zone having a harvest limit, as well as a statewide harvest limit. Two years later, there were only harvest limits in 6 out of the 13 management zones, so they did not feel harvest limits had to be placed across the board. The statewide harvest limit was dropped, as well. The 2011/2012 hunting season was from August 30 to March 31, with the exception of two areas which were extended. Those areas were the Lolo and Selway where it was difficult to remove some wolves. Trapping, during that season, was allowed in five northern zones where harvest the prior year was not adequate. Hunters were allowed to purchase two tags and trappers could purchase three. That year, 379 wolves were taken and trappers accounted for 33 percent of the take.

Regarding the current season, additional expansion of hunting and trapping seasons were adopted, including year round hunting on private property and the Pandhandle region, new trapping seasons were added in 15 game management units across 4 wolf zones, and hunters could purchase 5 wolf tags in 7 of the 13 zones and trappers could purchase 5 trapping tags in 6 of the 9 zones. Limits remained in the other zones. **Mr. Gould** stated that they are 25 percent ahead of where they were last year in regards to harvest. The State now requires wolf trappers to take a mandatory training class before they are allowed to trap wolves and it seems that it has served Idaho well. About 2,000 trappers have taken the class and have learned the trapping technique. After one year of this implementation, Montana copied Idaho's program.

In 2013, IDFG contracted several trappers to continue trapping after the season closed to address some predation on elk in north central Idaho, specifically in the Lolo, Selway, and parts of the Panhandle. Seven wolves were taken. More recently, IDFG hired a trapper to target wolves in the Middle Fork elk zone. Seven wolves were taken there during the month of December.

Cost of wolf management and the impacts to local economy have exceeded what people forecasted going into this federal financial support. Monitoring has declined over the past two years and will cease completely in 2016. Total wolf management expenditures exceeded \$1.4 million in FY 2013, slightly higher than the previous year. Sources of funds to pay for those expenditures include: \$650,000 from the federal appropriation (money that will be phased out); \$450,000 was funded through license sales; and \$400,000 came from the excise tax on ammunition and firearms.

Mr. Gould said that looking into the future, they will remain consistent with the 2002 conservation plan during their five year recovery period, which goes through May, 2016. The wolves were delisted in 2009, then relisted, then delisted again. Management will continue towards the 150 total wolves or 15 packs; will manage for a balance between predator and prey species; and more aggressive harvest and control efforts will be applied where conflicts exist. Seasons and bag limits need to be simplified and preliminary proposals are being submitted for the next big game season-setting process, which the Commission will act on in March.

Mr. Gould stated that the facts presented were biological management facts and regarding social facts - once the wolf was delisted, some of the social tension left. Public sentiment is highly polarized and emotionally charged regarding wolf management, in general. That concluded the presentation.

**PASSED THE
GAVEL:**

Chairman Pearce thanked Mr. Gould, then passed the gavel to Vice Chairman Bair to conduct the meeting for the hearing of some rules.

RULES:

Vice Chairman Bair called on Ms. Sharon Kiefer, Deputy Director, IDFG, to present the rules for the Idaho Fish and Game Commission.

**DOCKET NO.
13-0108-1302:**

This rule governs the taking of big game animals in the state of Idaho. **Ms. Kiefer** said that this rule revises the Nonresident Junior Mentored Tag to delete the requirement that the accompanying adult have a tag valid in the same area. **Ms. Kiefer** indicated that this recommendation was brought forth by some sportsmen.

MOTION:

Senator Cameron made the motion to accept **Docket No. 13-0108-1302**. The motion was seconded by **Chairman Pearce**. The motion passed by unanimous **voice vote**.

**DOCKET NO.
13-0108-1303:**

This rule also governs the taking of big game animals in the state of Idaho. **Ms. Kiefer** said that in 2012, H457 allowed rules for controlled hunt tag designation to a minor child or grandchild. This rule makes a minor wording change to more closely align statute and rule language for designating a controlled hunt tag from a parent or grandparent to his or her minor child or grandchild.

MOTION:

Senator Tippetts made the motion to accept **Docket No. 13-0108-1303**. The motion was seconded by **Senator Heider**. The motion passed by unanimous **voice vote**.

**DOCKET NO.
13-0109-1301:**

This rule governs the taking of game birds in the state of Idaho. **Ms. Kiefer** said that in 2012, H 457 allowed rules for controlled hunt tag designation to a minor child or grandchild. This rule makes a minor wording change to more closely align statute and rule language for designating a controlled hunt tag from a parent or grandparent to his or her minor child or grandchild.

MOTION:

Senator Cameron made the motion to accept **Docket No. 13-0109-1301**. The motion was seconded by **Chairman Pearce**. The motion passed by unanimous **voice vote**.

DOCKET NO. 13-0111-1301: This rule governs fish. **Ms. Kiefer** said that this rule defines the terms "single-point hook" and "watercraft" which have been used for many years in fish season proclamations.

The term "single-point hook" is used to limit fishing tackle to prevent snagging. In certain situations where fish are large, visible, and congregated, hooks with more than one point create a higher probability that anglers could intentionally or unintentionally snag a fish. This can lead to illegal harvest or unintended mortality. This is of particular concern in fisheries for salmon and steelhead in tributary river systems.

The term "watercraft" is used to limit angler conflict and address safety concerns. In some reservoirs and large river fisheries with concentrated angler use, there can be conflicts and/or unsafe conditions for bank/wading anglers created by wake from watercraft. Watercraft anchored in desired fishing areas can also monopolize preferred fishing locations to the point that bank/wading anglers have no opportunity to fish. These events are rare but occur in waters with high-use salmon and steelhead fisheries.

MOTION: **Senator Siddoway** made the motion to accept **Docket No. 13-0111-1301**. The motion was seconded by **Senator Heider**. The motion passed by unanimous **voice vote**.

DOCKET NO. 13-0111-1302: This rule governs fish. **Ms. Kiefer** said that this rule is intended to minimize the risk of injury to sturgeon when landed by anglers. Only 'catch-and-release' angling is allowed in Idaho for sturgeon. Keeping the sturgeon in the water allows the natural buoyancy of the water to support internal organs of larger fish. Sturgeon have a cartilaginous skeleton which is not as supportive as a bony skeleton found in most fish species. The rule was in IDAPA through 2008 and was inadvertently removed during a chapter restructure, but the rule was not rescinded by the Commission.

MOTION: **Senator Cameron** made the motion to accept **Docket No. 13-0111-1302**. The motion was seconded by **Senator Siddoway**. The motion passed by unanimous **voice vote**.

PASSED THE GAVEL: **Vice Chairman Bair** said that concluded the hearings on the rules and thanked the Committee for their participation, as well as Ms. Kiefer. He then passed the gavel back to Chairman Pearce.

ADJOURNED: **Chairman Pearce** adjourned the meeting at 2:40 p.m.

Senator Pearce
Chair

Juanita Budell
Secretary